

New generation fighting new wars

BY KERRY BENJOE, LEADER-POST NOVEMBER 12, 2011

Recent and current conflicts in the world have created a new generation of First Nation war veterans.

Many are volunteering to serve for various reasons.

"I joined because I lost my father Corky Rosebluff when I was five years old," said Sgt. Gregory Rosebluff of the United States Army, currently stationed in Germany. "He was a powwow announcer and I love powwow. I saw how all the veterans were older and getting older. I thought that I would someday serve and come into grand entry to honour my father, my family, and all the veterans."

For Tyrone Roper from the Yellow Quill/Muskowekwan First Nations, it was a childhood dream to enlist.

"I always used to play with G.I. Joes growing up," he recalled. "I always wanted to be in the army."

In 2001, his dream came true when he became part of the 3rd of the 327 Infantry Regiment of the 101st Airborne stationed in Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

In March 2003, Roper was deployed to Iraq where he spent the next 10 months.

"I loved the army," said Roper. "I just wish I was better prepared for some of the aftermath when I got home. It was hard to adjust once I got back."

He credits older war veterans like George Benson for helping him adjust to life after combat.

"He helped me with my feelings," said Roper. "He knew what I went through because he was a combat veteran also."

Looking back, Roper has no regrets because about joining.

He still loves the military life and encourages young people to consider it as a profession. Roper volunteers his time with the cadet program on Muskowekwan.

"I hope the youth see another side of life they can look forward to and strive towards," he said.

Since joining, Rosebluff has served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Iraq was my first experience with actual war, and dealing with what comes with it prepared me for my next deployment to Afghanistan," he said. "The U.S. army has been both rewarding and difficult. It has been filled with new friends, losses, the most beautiful sights and the most horrible. In the end I would not trade it for anything. I am extremely proud of what I do and what I am serving for."

He's looking forward to returning to Canada.

"When my contract is done in 2015, I would like to move home and drink tea and play horse shoes all day, maybe teach kindergarten," said Rosebluff.

Roper has embraced his new role as a veteran in the First Nation community.

Over the weekend, Roper participated in the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations annual powwow.

"I feel honoured to be in the company of my fellow veterans," said Roper.

It's a role Rosebluff is waiting to experience.

Both Roper and Rosebluff encourage others to never be afraid to try something new.

"Dream. I mean really dream," said Rosebluff. "It may sound corny but I think dreams are our Creator's blueprints for us."

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